



Final report of the discussion

**Global Dialogue Forum on the Needs of Older Workers
in relation to Changing Processes and
the Working Environment in Retail Commerce**
(Geneva, 21–22 September 2011)

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Introduction

1. The Global Dialogue Forum on the Needs of Older Workers in relation to Changing Work Processes and the Working Environment in Retail Commerce was held at the International Labour Office in Geneva from 21–22 September 2011. The Governing Body of the ILO had approved the convening of the Forum at its 304th Session (March 2009). Based on the agreed points of discussion, the Office prepared an Issues paper ¹ to serve as a basis for the Forum's deliberations.
2. The purpose of the Forum was to examine the relationship between the needs of older workers in the context of an ageing population and the labour requirements of the retail sector. The Forum also recognized the dynamic context influencing retail services, including such factors as globalization, e-commerce and evolving technologies.
3. The Chairperson of the Forum was Mr Shahmir, Counsellor and Labour Attaché of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The coordinator of the Government group was Mr Isawa (Japan). The Employer and Worker spokespersons were respectively Mr Woolford and Mr Stark. The Secretary-General of the Forum was Mr Ratteree, Officer-in-Charge of the Sectoral Activities Department (SECTOR), the Executive Secretary was Mr Sendanyoye (SECTOR), assisted by Mr Myers (SECTOR), and the coordinator of the secretariat services was Ms Than Tun (SECTOR).
4. The Forum was attended by Government representatives from Angola, Austria, Barbados, Brazil, Egypt, El Salvador, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Thailand and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Nine Employer and 14 Worker participants also attended the Forum, as did representatives of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).
5. Mr Oumarou, Officer-in-Charge of the Social Dialogue Sector of the ILO, welcomed the participants, stating that it was the latest in a series of major meetings organized by the ILO to review priority issues and propose the way forward in the commerce sector. The first ever Global Dialogue Forum, held in September 2008, was on the commerce, reaching consensus on: enhancing commerce workers' employability; improving vocational training systems; designing and implementing national action plans to improve commerce workers' skills and employability; and developing and applying national skills forecasting and skills identification systems. The 2006 tripartite meeting on the sector had adopted conclusions calling for a balance between enterprise flexibility and worker security and employability in the context of introducing advanced retail technologies. He concluded by underlining the critical role of social dialogue for harmonious industrial relations and long-term productivity growth and improved employment conditions in the sector.
6. The Chairperson welcomed the participants, noting the challenges facing the retail sector in such areas as the working environment, training and staff development and an ageing population. The Forum discussion should focus on proposing practical solutions to address the concerns of working women and men in the retail sector, defining the respective roles of policy-makers and social partners with a view to ensuring the sector's sustainability, improve employment opportunities and benefits for societies as a whole.

¹ *Adapting work processes and working environments in retail commerce to older workers' needs*, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_163451.pdf.

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- 7.** The Employer spokesperson stressed the universal importance of the topic as, unlike other sectors, all countries had a retail sector, which, also contrary to other industries, was very strongly driven by often capricious customers. The urgency of the challenge in addressing the needs of older workers differed depending upon national demographic trends. Retailers and their staff had to have the flexibility to respond to shopping traffic surges that could be seasonal, monthly, daily, or even hourly. They also needed to take account of recent innovations in retail technology. Many countries had adopted measures encouraging employment creation for younger workers, but considering the ageing populations and the shortage of workers in the retail sector, policy-makers together with the sectoral social partners should collaborate to design and apply human resource policies that met customer demands.
 - 8.** The Worker spokesperson considered both the topic and timing of the discussion well chosen. The Forum was discussing the topic in a context of economic insecurity, poor consumer confidence and government spending cuts. ILO estimates showed that, globally, 200 million people in the formal economy had lost jobs. For these reasons, older workers' issues needed to be addressed urgently. Although the age profiles of developed, developing, and emerging economies differed, the demographic transition was a global preoccupation. Long-term unemployment was severely affecting the older generation as well as the younger generation. The retail commerce sector provided an entry point into the labour market for many young people. To meet consumer demand, it was sometimes necessary that the retail labour force reflected its customer base, especially as consumers aged. The Forum should recommend good practices to create opportunities for older workers, taking as an example the successful collaboration on this question between UNI Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce at the European level.
 - 9.** The Government representative of the Philippines noted that his country had a relatively young population and workforce. In 2007, workers aged 55 years and above accounted for 13 per cent of the total employed population of about 33.7 million. As in many other countries, both the population and the workforce were expected to age in the decades ahead. Currently, no laws or regulations were in place governing the working conditions specifically for older workers, although many remained economically active beyond the retirement age of 65. In addition, no research had as yet been carried out on the occupational safety and health requirements for older workers. Nor had any review been undertaken of the changes in work processes and the working environment that would be necessary to facilitate the continued work of older workers. Government delegates would welcome Forum proposals to support age-related policies and programmes, as well as an age-friendly and non-discriminatory work environment that focused on such older-worker-friendly issues as age-related health promotion and work–life balance.
 - 10.** The Government representative of Japan highlighted his country's combined rapid population ageing and fast declining birth rate. In his view, it was therefore important that the Forum suggested ways to ensure that the retail industry continued to have access to an adequate supply of labour, including increasing its capacity to attract and retain older people, while also promoting their decent work.
 - 11.** The Government representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran noted that even less developed nations could eventually expect aged populations; all countries faced the same destiny. Respecting the rights of older workers and providing decent working conditions for them was a means of safeguarding this generation. Meanwhile, effort should be made to ensure older workers kept pace with technological advances, including through training to meet new skills demands.
 - 12.** The Executive Secretary of the Forum introduced the Office's Issues paper prepared for the discussion, explaining its background and the basis for the suggested points for discussion. Section 1 defined the retail commerce sector, described its diversity, even

within the same country, and its varying levels of development across the world. Section 2 offered case studies about the industry's contribution to economic output and its share in overall employment. Section 3 reviewed demographic and labour force trends, while Section 4 suggested integrated life-cycle policies to promote the employment of older workers.

Employment and occupational characteristics of retail commerce, working conditions, current age profiles of retail commerce workers and the effect of demographic trends

13. The Worker spokesperson pointed out that although the retail sector was global, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) continued to dominate in many countries, while union representation and social dialogue were more difficult in smaller enterprises, especially when they were family operated. In other economies, the special needs of older workers were rarely considered during restructuring arising from bankruptcies, downsizing, mergers and acquisitions at the global level. The growing prominence of e-commerce also posed a new challenge for training older workers.
14. An Employer participant from Germany recalled his country's past policies to address youth unemployment. The current demographic shift meant that the greater danger was of labour shortages rather than unemployment; the German Government needed to refocus policy to reflect this change. The retail sector was like a front line: people could not live in an area without retail services. Greater opportunities for part-time employment, which accounted for over 50 per cent of all retail sector jobs, could be an important means to keep older people in the industry. The retail sector is a gateway to the world of work for many young people, with one third of workers under the age of 30. He highlighted that the Forum should focus on policies to recruit and retain older workers, including flexible work schedules.
15. An Employer participant from Japan confirmed that her country was in the eye of the storm as far as an ageing population was concerned. The situation raised critical issues for both older workers and older consumers, including the need for flexibility in work organization in order to respond to diverse customer demands. The industry needed an optimized workforce mix of older workers for their experience, younger workers to ensure a next generation of staff, as well as women workers to reflect the customer base.
16. A Worker participant from Japan highlighted three points. First, too much attention was given to the need for the sector to be customer-driven while giving insufficient consideration to worker satisfaction. Second, access to vocational education and training opportunities should be extended to ageing workers as well. Finally, the sector's potential to support the post-earthquake and tsunami recovery should be highlighted.
17. The Government representative of El Salvador hoped the discussion would include issues that were of importance to his country's retail sector, such as health and safety for older workers. Many workers in his country as well as other developing countries were employed in the informal retail sector, where they often worked 12 to 14 hours daily just to make ends meet. The size of such an informal commerce sector implied a correspondent need for reliable statistics on these activities on which ILO assistance would be greatly appreciated.
18. The Government representative of Barbados, noting her country's high youth unemployment and limited pension schemes, proposed that the Forum should consider policies to encourage job creation for both younger and older workers. Such policy

solutions could include part-time work arrangements as well as emphasizing information technology (IT) and e-commerce training for all workers.

- 19.** The Government representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran reported that, given the approximately 2.5 million unemployed in his country, youth were being encouraged to extend their education as long as possible. Given the importance of the retail commerce sector as an entry point into the labour market, his country was taking steps to ensure it provided decent working conditions, including a secure working environment. This was particularly important for older workers who might be unable to react quickly or appropriately to third party attacks. In concluding, the speaker hoped the Forum would also consider the implications of casual and part-time employment in the sector for student workers.
- 20.** An Employer participant from Argentina stated that, when both formal and informal operators were combined, the retail sector was his country's largest employer. The sector was also far from being a mere "stepping stone" into the labour market, as was the case in other countries. Because young workers continued to look to the sector as their biggest source of employment, Governments should pay more attention to it. Recognizing this fact, retailers make efforts to retain workers, including through the provision of skills and qualifications. In relation to the issue under discussion, rather than flexibility, perhaps what was needed most to attract and retain older workers was more support on skills development and training.
- 21.** An Employer participant from Malaysia stated that his country's retail sector accounted for about 10 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and employed about 2 million people, many of them on part-time. The sector, whose socio-economic importance was recognized by the Government, currently faced a worker shortage. Encouraging older workers to continue working was considered one of the solutions to this shortage and the Government had accordingly adopted new legislation on part-time employment.
- 22.** An Employer participant from India reported that his country's retail sector, comprising mainly of small operators, accounted for 10–12 per cent of total GDP for around 7.3 per cent of total national labour force. The "Unorganized Sector Bill" defined basic minimum working conditions for the approximately 90 per cent of Indian workers employed in informal economic activities, many of them in informal retail, and facilitated setting up of social security schemes for them. He agreed with previous speakers that flexible work arrangements appeared necessary to attract and retain older workers in the sector.
- 23.** An Employer participant from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela stressed the unavoidability of flexible working hours for small retail employers while also recognizing that training on technology would even be better. His country faced a dual challenge of providing jobs for young people while also encouraging women, whose retirement age was currently 55, to work longer. Raising the age of retirement and eliminating barriers to labour market re-entry of retired people should be part of the strategy to attract and retain older workers into the sector.
- 24.** A Worker participant from Japan confirmed the information in the Office's Issues paper regarding the high proportion of older workers in his country's retail sector, relating this to the Elderly Employment Stabilization Law which required employers to guarantee employment up to 65 years (beyond the legal retirement age of 64 years). Because demographic change affected both retail sector workers and its customers concurrently, older workers' understanding of older consumers' needs and purchasing patterns represented a critical asset. It was also important to examine the need for flexibility not only from the employers' perspective but also from that of workers.

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25. The Worker spokesperson noted how flexibility was a recurrent theme, which arose from a general worldwide trend towards liberalizing and extending shop opening hours. Drawing attention to retail's large proportion of part-time workers, he acknowledged that for some this was voluntary. For others, however, part-time employment was involuntary and represented precarious work. Workers strongly believed that full-time employment should be the standard, and whatever the case, the social partners needed to be involved in determining when part-time work was appropriate to eradicate incidences of working poverty and increase decent work.
 26. A Worker participant from South Africa stressed that flexibility and part-time work should meet the needs of both employers and workers, not be unilaterally imposed, and avoid wide variations in terms of employment and working conditions among workers of the same company. She underlined the need for companies to improve their practices in this area in order to enhance their ability to attract and retain workers, also recognizing the strong link between staff loyalty and customer loyalty. In addition, workers needed to be able to count on their accumulated pension benefits for their retirement, and thus the Forum should discuss the role of wage and remuneration policies as part of the sector's strategy for attracting and retaining workers both young and old.
 27. A Worker participant from Malaysia stated that her country's Government encouraged retail employers to invest more in training their workers. Older workers faced discrimination and were often replaced with younger or migrant workers. Given the many erroneously negative perceptions about older workers, more research about them, as well as more positive approaches to encourage their recruitment, retention and training, were required.
 28. A worker participant from Chile reported a relatively high proportion of young workers in his country's retail sector, which often resulted in 40-year-olds being considered old workers. He decried the frequent misuse of flexibility for the sole purpose of cost cutting by replacing full-time with part-time workers.
 29. An Employer participant from EuroCommerce noted that flexibility and part-time work differed substantially among European countries, and some issues, such as shop opening hours and work-life balance, were best dealt with at the national level and should remain so. EuroCommerce and UNI Europa Commerce had jointly developed a toolkit on third-party violence prevention that could be a model for similar tools elsewhere at the global level. Work on a multisectoral initiative to raise awareness about violence, which could similarly be adapted to the needs of retailers outside Europe, was also under way.
 30. An Employer participant from Germany, remarking that in his country part-time work was mostly voluntary especially for women with family responsibilities or students, stressed that it would be wrong to consider such work as "precarious". In addition, given the fact that the majority of workers in his country's retail sector were in voluntary part-time work, it would be inappropriate to classify such arrangements as non-standard, precarious, good or bad as this type of classification rigidity was no solution.
 31. An Employer participant from Portugal underlined employers' need for flexibility in order to be able to respond to customer demand, noting that opportunities existed to match employer and worker interests on flexibility. Recalling a point made by a previous Worker participant, he expressed doubt about younger workers being necessarily less costly than older workers. Regarding part-time work and operational flexibility, he supported contractual agreements to regulate such arrangements.
 32. A representative of UNI Global Union joined his colleague from EuroCommerce to support the adaptation and use of their joint *Toolkit on preventing third party violence in commerce* in other regions. While recognizing retailers' need for flexible work

arrangements, he expressed workers' concern about supermarkets increased recourse to contract workers provided by private employment agencies rather than their own staff. It was important to remember that retail was a low-wage sector, and that its workers needed a living wage.

33. The Government representative of El Salvador noted the high security costs in his country arising from a prevalence of gangs and drug trafficking which, despite Government efforts, weakened growth in the retail sector.
34. The Government representative of the Philippines, noting that the retail labour market in his country included many young and women workers, requested that the term "older worker" be satisfactorily defined. He considered that the issues that should be considered in the context discussions on attracting and retaining older workers should include the need to invest in training to sustaining their productivity and employability; adaptation of national policies to reflect demographic change; and government programmes to encourage job creation for both younger and older workers.
35. The Government representative of South Africa reported that the retail sector, which was characterized by a high proportion of temporary and casual labour, was also one of her country's major sources of employment. Regulatory measures had been introduced to address this pattern of employment. There was also no need to look at the employment of older and younger workers from a zero-sum perspective. In order to better regulate wages, working conditions and the use of contract workers, including in the retail sector, the Government had amended the labour law to promote equity and collective bargaining rights, and protect vulnerable workers and advance the Decent Work Agenda. Flexibility was required but there should be no compromising with the right to decent work standards, workers' equal access to jobs and training.
36. A Government representative of Japan (Ms Nagakura) observed that her country's population was ageing faster than for any other country. The Government sought to increase the employment rates of youth, women and the elderly in order to promote growth. Towards this end, it planned to gradually raise the official pensionable age from 60 to 65 years. Because many older people were willing to continue to work even after retirement, it was of utmost importance to eliminate barriers to their continued employment, allowing them to work even as they drew social security benefits.

The main factors shaping future labour demand in retail commerce

37. The Worker spokesperson acknowledged the challenge for retail commerce employers to recruit and retain staff within the context of an ageing population. There was often also a mismatch between employers' skills demand and older workers' skills, which required greater government support to promote older workers' employability through training to keep their skills up to date. He underlined the need for equal treatment for workers, including older workers, in part-time jobs. Equal treatment was a recurrent theme of ILO standards, and employment practices for part-time workers should faithfully reflect those standards.
38. The Employer spokesperson identified three broad issues shaping future labour demand from an employer perspective: technological innovation, e-commerce, declining demand for tangible products and an increase in demand for services as consumers also aged in line with demographic trends.

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39. An Employer participant from Japan reported a ¥3 trillion drop in department store sales in her country over the previous ten years, corresponding to the same amount of increase in e-commerce sales over the same period. As a result, store-based retailers understood that to compete effectively with their online rivals, they had to provide superior quality service while also expanding into online sales channels. Store-based retailers also understood that older; more experienced workers were best suited to provide such high-quality and high-value service differentiating them from their online rivals.
 40. The Government representative of the Philippines, speaking on behalf of the coordinator of the Government group, stated that their group believed countries' differing cultures and traditions, varied market behaviours and demand patterns influenced how older workers were treated. A sectoral approach on the employment of older workers was needed, which recognized, nevertheless, that there could not be a one-size-fits-all solution to this issue as each country's retail markets had a number of unique characteristics. Governments also considered social dialogue, including between the social partners and sometimes with other stakeholders such as representative associations of older people, to be crucial in designing the rules and measures to promote the employment of older workers. There were a number of challenges, however, including the fact that in many developing countries, the most pressing concern was youth unemployment and the paucity of reliable statistics to inform policy development. In this connection, ILO assistance would be valuable in compiling and disseminating a catalogue of good practices on the promotion of older workers' employment in different countries. ILO support would similarly be critical in the design and delivery of special training and other support programmes for older workers, in cooperation with governments and the social partners.
 41. The Government representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran observed that population mapping of different countries showed them to be on different points on the same continuum of demographic change. Different push-pull factors influenced labour demand in countries' retail sectors, with particularly marked variations between developing and advanced countries. Government policies must necessarily reflect different national dynamics.
 42. The Employer spokesperson, noting that people consumed fewer goods as they grew older, stated that, to remain competitive, retailers needed to increase the services content in their offer and adopt multichannel distribution strategies, including e-commerce, to cater to varied consumer demands. This would require the development of new types of retail sales operations, functions and positions, and the expansion of retail distribution centres, implying workers trained on new market strategies and technologies.
 43. An Employer participant from Malaysia supported the views expressed by the previous speaker, emphasizing that the potential for job growth in warehouses and logistics as e-commerce expanded.
 44. An Employer participant from Portugal added that, as e-commerce expanded – increasing the need for product picking and handling in warehouses and distribution centres – work schedules would need to be reorganized and new tools developed to reflect the new realities.
 45. The representative of the IOE regretted several negative adjectives used by some participants regarding temporary and part-time work, noting that an ILO global dialogue forum on workers supplied by private employment agencies was scheduled for October 2011. Observing that such work arrangements responded to real demand, he nevertheless stressed the employers' belief that enterprises must at all times respect the national laws and regulations of countries within which they operated. Similarly, governments should adopt and enforce laws promoting fundamental rights at work including those articulated in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which

employers fully supported. He stressed the importance of labour inspection to ensure compliance with labour statutes.

46. The Worker spokesperson acknowledged employers' concerns regarding the impending problems of labour shortage arising from population ageing. While labour laws, regulations and labour inspections were important in promoting or safeguarding decent working conditions, responsibility to promote those standards in the workplace lay primarily with the social partners through collective bargaining processes. It was also important to give workers, including older workers, a role in driving e-commerce skills development programmes and work organization to reduce the physical burden on older workers.
47. A Worker participant from the Russian Federation stressed the importance of the topic of the Forum for commerce trade unions in his country who frequently acknowledged employers' need for worker flexibility, including the necessity of sometimes resorting to short-term contracts, as long as such flexibility did not result in eroding workers' rights.
48. The Government representative of the Philippines observed that the major determinant of future labour demand in the retail sector would be the rate of growth of business activity and the sector's competitiveness vis-à-vis other sectors. Retailers' recruitment capacity could also be enhanced by greater adoption of online tools, processes and procedures that provided better information on open positions and improved matching of job vacancies with job applications. Older workers' training also needed to start from a recognition and certification of previously acquired skills.
49. The Government representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran reported that his country's retail sector ranged from small family-run businesses to futuristic virtual stores. Future labour demand in the sector would be closely determined by the level of the sector's development and types of formats in the country; its degree of globalization and concentration; prevalent work organization; the sector's diversity; levels of national incomes; the penetration of e-commerce; the degree of retail market and labour market regulation or liberalization; the availability of the requisite skills; and evolving consumer behaviour and preferences. Within this context, technology would be key to how competitive a country's retail market would be.
50. The Government representative of Austria explained his country's system to facilitate workers' sliding progression from full-time work to retirement, including compensation for those over the age of 55 working less than full time. Because part time may not always be voluntary, with people having no other choice even though part time may represent income erosion, the State paid a top-up amount representing the difference between full pay and part-time pay. The system was currently under review to consider ways to improve the programme in order to discourage workers from early retirement while also drawing the equivalent of their full pension.
51. The Employer spokesperson clarified, in response to a previous question from his Worker counterpart, that, as people aged, their consumption of goods declined while that of services, including health care, travel, leisure activities and restaurant and catering services, increased. He noted that the bulk of retailers remained small family-operated businesses lacking large human resource departments and enough knowledge to ensure respect for labour legislation and regulation. Governments therefore needed to ensure, through their labour inspection, that decent workplace standards were properly enforced.
52. An Employer participant from Germany, citing highly reliable German statistics on age and expenditure patterns, confirmed that as they get older Germans increased their savings rate with a view to being able to leave inheritances to their children and their grandchildren. Ageing societies demanded greater social expenditure on care, which meant

less expenditure elsewhere; as social security payments rose, money for other areas, including for wages in other sectors, declined. In retail, age also determined customers' preference for the person who served them; younger customers tended to prefer dealing with younger staff, while older customers similarly preferred being served by older staff. Germany also had a wage top-up system comparable to the one in Austria, although Germany's scheme was aimed at facilitating early retirement rather than retention. The social burden needed to be rebalanced so that one generation was not outweighed with costs in favour of another.

53. The Worker spokesperson stated that one of the key problems of the retail sector was its low degree of social partner organization, which partly explained the prevalence of lower than average pay. The sectoral predominance of SMEs and low skills aggravated this situation, while also deriving from, and contributing to, the low levels of social partner organization. While spending and consumption patterns were influenced by age, there was a risk of analysing tomorrow's labour markets using a framework appropriate to today's situation. Future consumption patterns were likely to change and be closely correlated to rising life expectancy. Trade unions were reluctantly accepting that longer working life would be necessary as lifespan increased. Unions also loved the Austrian model of top-up pay for today's labour market, although they believed that such schemes would be unnecessary for labour markets 20 years in the future because of demographic change. A higher proportion of collective bargaining could facilitate better working conditions and improve worker retention.
54. A Worker participant from Japan listed some of the reasons motivating older workers to stay employed in the retail sector after the retirement age. Retirement was traditionally fixed at a certain age, which might not suit the preference of some workers. Some workers also continued to work part time beyond the age of retirement in order to be able to support their hobbies and other interests, while others might not want to continue being an economic animal in full-time employment, opting instead for other choices, including part-time work.

Measures to attract and retain older workers for increased competitive capacity of the sector in the labour market

55. The Worker spokesperson stressed that, for his group, this was the most important point of the Forum's discussion. A more inclusive sector, providing equal employment access for older workers while also adding value for employers and the sector as a whole, was the goal. Studies covering companies on the United States stock markets indicated that, from the worker perspective, the best companies to work for were those that paid workers well: better pay resulted in greater worker satisfaction, more commitment and better customer service. It was important to acknowledge, however, that more employment of older workers raised a number of critical issues, including the need to tailor workplaces to their needs. Workers hoped to hear of examples of good practice regarding measures to improve the recruitment and retention of both older and younger workers in both retail commerce and other sectors.
56. A Worker participant from Finland remarked on the frequent mistaken conflation of the legal and effective ages of retirement. Businesses lost workers due to early retirement and disability separations. She also observed that, while it was excellent in theory, the concept of work ability referred to in the Office's Issues paper had sometimes been abused to punish workers who were deemed unable to continue to work at 100 per cent, when applied in the name of productivity capacity. Information derived from work ability processes should never be used in such a manner. Positive use could have good outcomes,

but abuse had led to negative outcomes and worker mistrust. There was a need to apply agreed approaches that were tailor-made to include part-time retirement, or short-term reduction in time worked with compensation for income loss in order for there to be positive results.

- 57.** A Worker participant from Indonesia reported a high demand for experienced older workers, who represented about 10 per cent of the sectoral workforce, especially from the many global retailers who were expanding into his country to tap into the opportunities presented by a very large population and rising incomes. Many of these global retailers were using the lure of high wages to poach experienced older workers from other companies, especially local ones. The real problem in his country was the widespread use of precarious contract labour arrangements for young workers who were paid below market wages. Social dialogue – both tripartite and bipartite – represented the best means to ensure equal and decent treatment for all workers, young and old.
- 58.** A Worker participant from Japan stressed that attraction and retention of older workers – or any other workers for that matter – required jobs that utilized their skills and paid fair wages, which were the only conditions that resulted in win-win outcomes for both employers and workers. He pointed to the example of department stores in Japan, which offered special services involving salespeople visiting homes to market expensive products. This was only possible where trust had been established through previous relationships. Employers especially appreciated older workers for their acumen in this area.
- 59.** The Employer spokesperson observed that, today, customers walked into retail stores often knowing more about the product they wanted to buy than the sales assistant did, which could be a challenge for workers whether young or older. Retailers increasingly realized that low price was no longer always the best proposition, that service was and that older workers' lifetime skills were very critical in this respect. Retailers also seemed to attract into their employment people at the beginning or the end of their working lives when they often required flexible working arrangements. Employers appreciated older workers especially because of a shared interest in flexible working arrangements coupled with the competitive advantage they could derive from such a knowledgeable workforce.
- 60.** An Employer participant from EuroCommerce reported on the European social dialogue process on the sector's skills needs. A European Skills Council for Retail had undertaken a mapping exercise to identify employer skills concerns and the skills development needs of retail workers in eight countries in order to address the mismatch between skills demand and supply. She also underlined the importance of health and safety issues at retail workplaces, noting that good working conditions prevented psychosocial problems, particularly those related to stress, which were a common problem with older workers. This issue would be the subject of the European social dialogue in 2012–13.
- 61.** An Employer participant from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela noted that other sectors, such as mining and manufacturing, had addressed the question of skills transfer to ensure workers' employability in other sectors. Many older workers had diverse work experiences and skills. There should be programmes to analyse the kinds of jobs these workers could do and where their skills could be beneficial. His country was already applying this type of approach in public enterprises and private enterprises were following the example.
- 62.** The Government representative of the Philippines stated that retention was not the main issue in some countries; the biggest problem was how to keep workers productive and satisfied. One way to attract and retain staff would be through appropriate legislation to prevent discrimination in recruitment and at work. It was also essential to overcome the reluctance of older workers to take up skills development opportunities. Among the common factors facilitating retention in some Asian countries was recognition of older

workers' experience and prior learning. In his country, policies and programmes on such subjects as IT training were drafted through tripartite social dialogue and implemented with the support of all partners. The programmes also offered ways on how to deal with workers from different age groups.

- 63.** A Government representative from Japan reported on her Government's efforts encouraging enterprises to retain workers who wished to continue working until the age of 65. The Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities (JEED) had introduced several programmes to facilitate such continued work, funded by employment insurance contributions. Measures included flexible working hours and reduced workloads for older workers. JEED offered consultation services for employers who were willing to hire or retain older workers and provided advice on modifying working facilities and creating new job categories for older workers. The organization also collected examples of good practice, and annually published examples of successful workplaces. She gave examples of two supermarkets that, since 2008, allowed older workers – in one case including those over 70 years old – who could serve under modified conditions to ensure the effective transfer of their knowledge and experience. Between 2007 and 2009, the Department Store Association had implemented an initiative with JEED support and trade union cooperation to promote the employment of older workers. JEED also compiled guidelines on the employment of older workers, highlighting different factors affecting their ability to gain and keep a job: perceptions, traditions as well as many socio-cultural perceptions. Finally, JEED had also contributed to the establishment of a joint labour management committee that addresses older workers' needs.
- 64.** The Government representative of Barbados reported high unemployment in her country, which was the reason for current policies encouraging early retirement and job creation for younger workers. These policies allowed people to exit the labour market on relatively comfortable terms, while facilitating their return to employment if they so wished. The Government encouraged retailers to provide pensions; retiree organizations helped to provide them with healthy activities and a number of firms used retired employees to train younger workers. Government, for its part, provided free public transport after a certain age.
- 65.** A Worker participant from Malaysia stated that the retail sector in Malaysia employed more than 3 million workers, of which 60 per cent were women. Older workers frequently sought employment with outsourcing firms, supermarkets or department stores, since pensions were insufficient to cover living expenses and there was no mandatory retirement age as long as one continued to be healthy. Medical check-ups were compulsory; and occupational health and safety equipment, such as special shoes and helmets, were required. In her opinion, both young and older workers had rights that should be protected. Employers should consider flexible working days to allow these workers to meet their family responsibilities.
- 66.** The Employer spokesperson reiterated that everyone must understand that in retail commerce, unlike in other industries, the consumer was the ruthless arbiter; the ultimate decider. The social partners needed to recognize that retailers must be able to respond quickly to changing customers' needs. He felt that there had been a good discussion of the challenges facing employers in the sector, and looked forward to the discussion of future steps.
- 67.** The Worker spokesperson, summing up, emphasized the need for social dialogue-based consensus on the terms and conditions needed to attract and retain older workers in the retail commerce sector, with government incentives to support the social partners in this effort. The main point should be negotiated arrangements for older workers' continued employment, covering such issues as flexible working, training and reskilling in view of the close correlation between skills and pay. Workers recognized retail employers' need

for flexible work organization during periods of increased competition, but efforts must also be made to find alternative ways of increasing workplace attractiveness for older workers in retail. The bottom line, however, was that his group was pleased with the debate and the common ground that had been reached by the Forum.

Suggestions for future ILO action

- 68.** The representative of the IOE, while congratulating participants for the excellent discussions they had just had, stressed the need to limit their submissions for future ILO action to those that could realistically be delivered. Recommendations for follow-up should focus on such areas as research and meetings of experts to develop guidelines for attracting and retaining older workers in the retail sector, based on the Japanese model and other examples of good practice from elsewhere. Such guidelines, addressing, for example, health and safety issues and pensions and workplace violence, could then be promoted through regional and/or national workshops.
- 69.** A representative of UNI Global Union agreed that the ILO should document good practices on ways to attract and retain older workers in retail commerce. In addition to the proposed regional and/or national meetings, it was desirable to consider convening an experts' meeting to draft a code of practice on conditions of work for older workers in retail commerce. Further research was also needed on the gender dimension and health and safety issues for older workers in the sector as, in his opinion, population ageing was likely to accentuate the incidence of women part-time workers in this sector in which women workers were already predominant especially in lower skilled functions. The analysis and comparison of training, skills and labour market outcomes in the United Kingdom and Germany provided in the Office's Issues paper should be expanded on to include additional countries if possible. The connection between older workers and e-commerce could also be examined.
- 70.** The Secretary-General stated that SECTOR would consider the recommendations of the tripartite constituents, but specific actions depended on financial and human resource availability. Given the ILO's programming framework, constituents would also need to do their part to ensure that these priorities were included during the process to develop Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs).
- 71.** The coordinator of the Government group underlined the need for the ILO to promote decent work especially for older workers, through social dialogue at all levels. He supported the request from the social partners for the Office to document and disseminate data and statistics on different country situations of older workers. Each country's situation should be considered, including the rate at which populations were ageing, and the retail sector demographic profiles and customer base. Technical cooperation to help countries to respond to this issue should be expanded and designed based on each country's specific needs. He stressed that, even though resources might be limited, the ILO should find ways to address the issues discussed in an effective manner.
- 72.** The Government representative of the Philippines, noting that all countries whether developing or advanced had older workers, stated that policies and programmes were necessary to address their special needs. He suggested that the ILO review and disseminate information on different countries' skills development policies and programmes, focusing especially on the impact of new technologies and the role of social dialogue in this process. He concluded by requesting that additional resources be allocated to this area of work.

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73. The Government representative of Japan, noting that his Government collected information on good practices on the employment of older workers, undertook to share this information, especially good examples of tripartite decision-making through social dialogue, such as the special guidelines created by Japanese department stores mentioned earlier.
 74. The Government representative of South Africa requested that ILO regional and field offices provide technical assistance on this issue. She also stressed the importance of DWCPs including work items on the retail sector.
 75. A Worker participant from Switzerland supported the points made by the Employer group on safety and health issues and on the need for further research.
 76. The Secretary-General of the Forum observed that the list of requests was long and rich. In order to keep the list at a manageable level, he proposed grouping the recommendations under three themes. First, the Office should collect and disseminate good practices based on the experiences of governments, workers and employers. Second, the Office took note of the request to organize meetings at the global and regional levels. Third, the constituents should ensure the inclusion in their national DWCPs of requests for technical assistance. He reminded them that resource allocation was the prerogative of the Governing Body and Forum participants could make representations to ensure the Forum's requests were included. The parties could also examine ways to support action on these specific items by seconding researchers to the ILO.

Consideration and adoption of points of consensus

77. Having reviewed an initial Office draft, prepared on the basis of discussion in plenary, the Forum adopted the following points of consensus, which include agreed amendments.

Points of consensus

Introduction

Government, Employer and Worker representatives attended the Global Dialogue Forum on the Needs of Older Workers in relation to Changing Work Processes and the Working Environment in Retail Commerce, held at the ILO, Geneva, 21–22 September 2011. The Forum was called to develop consensus-based recommendations on how work processes and the working environment in retail commerce could be adapted to the needs of an ageing workforce, taking into account the effects of technological changes. The Forum developed consensus on the following:

Employment and occupational characteristics of retail commerce and working conditions in the sector

1. Unlike many other sectors, retail commerce is important in every country. The sector is a major employer, ranging from small and medium-sized enterprises to large multinationals. As the essential link between producers and consumers, retail contributes substantially to business activity and national output. A well-functioning retail sector is critical to (and dependent upon) a healthy economy.
2. Employment demand arises from growth of the industry and replacement demand due to high turnover. Demand for labour in retail is predominantly for replacement purposes, especially in sales and customer service occupations. High labour turnover is explained in part by the seasonal nature of consumption and other factors – including those related to working conditions – that fuel demand for temporary staff, as well as by the high number of students and other casual employees, for whom retail employment represents a temporary arrangement.
3. The ILO's tripartite constituents recognize that, in a context of ageing populations and current or future labour shortages, high labour turnover will have major implications for the industry's prospects in terms of competitiveness and development. Governments and the social partners affirm a shared interest in stable and sustainable labour markets that ensure the availability of skilled and productive labour, adequately balancing flexibility with employment security and social security, while also ensuring work–life balance.
4. In some countries where youth employment has been a key feature of retail commerce, skills shortages have led (or may soon lead) to a need to increase the proportion of older workers in the workforce. However, some countries have major problems with youth unemployment (often involving highly qualified persons) that requires other policy solutions.
5. Forum participants recognize the often very different realities for older workers in both the formal and the informal retail sector in many countries – informal retailers may be operating in poverty conditions and working very long hours to make a living.
6. Regarding safety and security in retail – where third party violence is a problem – older workers may be more vulnerable.

Current age profiles of retail commerce workers and how these profiles and the sector's workforce may be affected by demographic trends, especially ageing populations

7. Demographic trends differ among countries, but almost all have increasing life expectancy, improved health care and declining birth rates. The majority of those employed in the retail sector are women, and as women have longer life expectancy, the demographic changes in the sector will be felt more acutely. Retail workers tend to be aged 30 years and under, especially compared to the economy-wide labour force. However, changes in the age structure of the industry are leading to an increasing share of workers aged 55 or more in many countries.
8. The retail industry provides a wide variety of types of employment, with part-time, seasonal and temporary positions representing a large proportion of retail jobs in many countries. As the share of the youth population declines, this labour-intensive industry must enhance its ability to draw a greater share of workers from among older workers. Governments and the social partners in retail commerce agree on the need for the industry to readjust human resource policies and practices, its work processes and the working environment in order to attract and retain older workers, especially in the high labour-utilization sales and customer service roles.

The main factors shaping future labour demand in retail commerce

9. The Forum noted the increasing integration of new technologies and innovations in retail operations, including a rapid growth of e-commerce in highly competitive markets, which has enabled many enterprises to expand their global supply chains as well as store outlets, reduce product handling errors and improve inventory control. Trends in e-commerce emphasize warehousing, product picking and dispatch work. Both developments may require specific measures to support recruitment and training of older workers in such areas, and to encourage them to apply their own knowledge and skills appropriately.
10. Continuing retail consolidation and rationalization, as well as internationalization, have resulted in the development of very large global retailers, although small and medium-sized retailers continue to dominate in many countries, both in terms of the number of businesses and share in sectoral employment. Increasing intensity of competition and large enterprises' heavy investment are squeezing smaller competitors, pushing many of them into niche markets in order to survive. The global economic crisis is also reshaping consumption and retail sales patterns around the world. The crisis and subsequent austerity measures may dampen consumer spending, encourage greater focus on value and price considerations, and strengthen the relative market share of discount stores. Older workers' employment in such outlets should be encouraged.
11. More than any other sector, retail commerce is completely reliant on its customers' demands, and must respond rapidly to evolving consumer behaviour.

Measures to attract and retain older workers for increased competitive capacity in the labour market: terms of employment; working conditions; occupational health and safety; flexible working; training and staff development

12. The Forum acknowledges the need for greater social dialogue, involving the social partners and policy-makers, to design and implement appropriate measures that make the sector more attractive, ensure decent work for older workers, and help to retain workers in the sector from youth to old age. Such measures need to draw on existing good practices in different sectors, covering such areas as: training, skills and human resource development and promotion; flexible working practices; and work organization and ergonomics. People should be able to work until official retirement ages and beyond if they should wish to do so.
13. While temporary work in retail is needed, permanent work should be open to older workers as well, and both should be provided for in accordance with national law and practice, taking account of the relevant provisions of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and relevant ratified international labour standards.
14. Consensus exists on the benefits and added value of applying good practices towards employing and ensuring a more inclusive workplace for older workers, allowing them to share their knowledge with younger workers and with customers. Older workers should have the possibility for a lightened workload through part-time work arrangements while they also benefit from retirement. Greater flexibility in working time is also required, to fit with customer requirements, workers' availability and their needs for work-life balance.
15. Greater focus is needed on:
 - age-related health promotion and ergonomics;
 - measures to adjust processes and the work environment to older workers;
 - integrated life-cycle policy to promote older workers' employment, recognizing their specific skills acquired over a lifetime of work, as well as the new skills they need;
 - third party violence;
 - developing research on psychosocial factors of work in commerce, especially as regards stress, with special reference to age-related issues; and
 - e-commerce.

National social dialogue is a useful tool to disseminate good practices relating to older workers.

16. Training, human resource development and promotion policies and programmes for workers of all ages should be geared to their specific needs, recognizing that everyone, at every age, thinks and learns differently. ILO constituents have consistently identified learning and training as a key driver of employability throughout one's working life, regardless of age and gender, country or sector. It is important to value prior learning and to recognize competencies as part of the strategy to attract and retain older workers. Employee satisfaction should also be taken into account.

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- 17.** The Forum noted that there are many examples of good practices aimed at retraining older workers. The European Portfolio of Good Practice, which aims at ensuring that older workers are not neglected in training and career development, that opportunities for learning are offered throughout working lives and that positive action is taken where necessary to compensate for past discrimination, provide a good template from which others might learn. Some countries have developed measures to promote employment up to and beyond the age of 70 with a more flexible working environment, working time and conditions for older workers, and publication of annual reports on best practices, e.g. supermarkets that have abolished a compulsory retirement age or made other adjustments to facilitate the work of over 70s. Some countries have legislation to prevent discrimination on the grounds of age (including on access to training); use of working ability measurements should also not be used to discriminate against older workers. Measures to retrain, re-skill, multiskill and re-employ older workers could be more widely studied and applied.
- 18.** The Forum noted that public pension systems that encourage early retirement could affect workers' willingness to continue to work in their later years. Any changes should be made in close consultation with the social partners.

Future ILO action to support decent work in the retail sector in the context of global population ageing

- 19.** Bearing in mind resource constraints faced within the Sectoral Activities Programme and the ILO programme and budget, the Forum requested the ILO to:
- (a) consider as a priority the organization of an experts meeting to review and further promote good industry practices through the adoption of a code of practice on older worker's employment by means of social dialogue. This may be followed up with the organization of regional, subregional and national activities to promote social dialogue in the sector, in particular the implementation of the Forum's consensus points, post-Forum research and knowledge sharing on good practices. To facilitate this, Forum participants agreed to request that the consensus points be utilized to promote action in their national Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) and other ILO programming frameworks;
 - (b) document examples of good practice on human resource policies, strategies and programmes aimed at attracting and retaining older workers that exist in different countries and sectors, analyse the reasons for their success and disseminate them and promote their adaptation and use by governments and retail commerce social partners around the world. In this respect, promotion of existing toolkits, guidelines and manuals and country examples of good practices to be shared with the ILO, would be a priority;
 - (c) undertake and disseminate research on various factors conducive to attracting and retaining older workers or those that may discourage their entry into jobs in retail commerce in both developed and developing countries, including gender differentiation and part-time work in this regard, with particular attention to the following issues:
 - employee retention policies;
 - training and skill development of older workers, notably on information technologies;

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- occupational safety and health, notably in relation to opening and closing hours and issues of violence at work in retail commerce;
 - impact of e-commerce on the work of older workers and their contributions to shifting business practices;
 - public and industry pension arrangements that facilitate hiring and retention of older workers;
- (d) mobilize, in cooperation with governments and the social partners, greater technical cooperation programmes as part of DWCPs to assist member States to address the priority issues identified by the Forum, relying on social dialogue as the principal vehicle to improve policy and practice in all countries, and taking account of their specific national contexts; and
- (e) augment resources, human and financial, devoted to this sector and the Sectoral Activities Programme more broadly in the framework of future ILO programme and budgets, and to facilitate the hosting of specialists from ILO constituents to work on the priority issues identified by the Forum as a supplement to the ILO's existing human resources.

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Liste des participants
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